



University of Maine News
Available at <http://www.umaine.edu/news>

UMaine-Based Drug Mail-Back Program Refunded, Expands

This article available at: http://www.umaine.edu/news/view_release.php?x=1247514244

July 13, 2009

Contact: Len Kaye, (207) 262-7922; George Manlove, (207) 581-3756

ORONO, Maine – The first-in-the-nation pharmaceuticals mail-back program launched in 2007 by the University of Maine's Center on Aging with partnering agencies has been refunded for another two years, and will more than double in size and scope as a result.

In the new phase of the program, 20,000 mail-back envelopes will be distributed throughout Maine to more than 100 pharmacies, medical facilities and community agencies, according to Len Kaye, director of the Center on Aging. So far, more than 1,000 pounds of unused and unwanted medicines have been mailed by 2,000 participants to the Maine Drug Enforcement Agency's Westbrook office for proper disposal, Kaye says.

The pharmaceuticals mail-back program is free, confidential and "remains the first and, as far as I know, continues to be the largest statewide mail-back program in the country," Kaye says. Agencies from other states continue to call the Center on Aging for advice about starting similar mail-back programs, he says.

The program, created by the Maine Legislature, was launched two years ago after receiving a \$150,000 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. This month, the state took over funding with a two-year commitment from the Maine Department of Public Safety and the Drug Enforcement Agency with \$150,000 from the Fund for Healthy Maine.

The program is cutting the flow of medications into the environment or into the hands of children or criminals. Flushing unwanted drugs down toilets simply mainlines them into the environment, according to Kaye and members of the Maine Benzodiazepine Study Group, which formed in part to combat improper disposal methods of unneeded pharmaceuticals.

Pharmaceuticals do not break down naturally and contaminate lakes, streams and water supplies, even after passing through people and wastewater treatment plants.

The largest category of mailed-back drugs -- 25 percent -- includes pharmaceuticals like antidepressants and antipsychotic drugs, followed by heart medicines.

Maine DEA Director Roy McKinney says the renewed funding ensures the statewide reach of the program.

"What I've seen in the first phase is of tremendous value," McKinney says. "People are struggling: 'What do I do with these unused medications?'"

"Public Safety Commissioner (Anne) Jordan and I think this is a valuable program for the citizens of Maine," he adds.

Information about the program and the Center on Aging is available by calling 1-866-637-9743, or click the link to Safe Medicine Disposal for ME Program under "UMCoA News" on the [Center on Aging Web site](#).

[Back to News](#)